

Such Is Life

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By Maurice Ketten

Story of Romance and Mystery Revealing Life in a Hospital

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

CHAPTER X.
(Continued.)

"You got out of here—get out quick!"

"She had jumped to her feet. But he only looked at her with understanding eyes."

"I know," he said. "That's the way I thought of it at first. Maybe I've just got used to the idea, but it doesn't seem so bad to me now. Here are you, drugging for other people when you ought to have a place all your own—and not getting younger any more than I am. Here's both of us lonely. I'd be a good husband to you, Tillie—because, whatever it'd be in law, I'd be your husband before God."

Tillie found her voice at last:

"I couldn't do it, Mr. Schwitter. I guess I'm a coward."

"Maybe I'm queer. It don't seem like wronging to me. What I thought was like this: I've got a little farm about seven miles from the city limits, and the tenant on it says that nearly every Sunday somebody motors out from town and wants a chicken and waffle supper. There ain't much in the nursery business any more. These landscape fellows buy their stuff direct, and the middle man's out. I've got a good orchard, and there's a spring, so I could put running water in the house. I'd be good to you, Tillie, I swear. I'd just the same make a marriage. Nobody need know it."

Tillie was crying softly into her apron. He put a work-hardened hand on her head and said:

"It isn't as if I'd run around after women," he said. "You're the only one, since Maggie. He drew a long breath and gave you time to think it over. Suppose I stop in to-morrow morning. It doesn't commit you to anything to talk it over."

"To-morrow morning," she said quietly, and went out the door.

All that hot August morning Tillie worked in a daze.

Le Moyne came late to his midday meal. Usually he had some cheerful banter for Tillie, to which she responded in kind. But, what with the heat and with heavy head of spirit, he did not notice her depression until he rose.

"Why, you're not sick, are you, Tillie?"

"No, no. Low in my mind, I guess."

Then, unexpectedly, she bent her head against a chair back and fell to silent crying. K. let her cry for a moment. Then—

"Now—tell me about it."

"I'm just worried; that's all."

"Let's see if we can't fix up the worries. Come, now, out with them."

"I'm a wicked woman, Mr. Le Moyne."

"Then I'm the person to tell it to. I'm pretty much of a lost soul myself."

He put an arm over her shoulders and drew her up, facing him.

"Suppose we go into the parlor and talk it out. I'll bet things are not as bad as you imagine."

But when, in the parlor that had seen Mr. Schwitter's grave proposal of the morning, Tillie poured out her story, K.'s face grew grave.

"The wicked part is that I want to go with him," she finished. "I keep thinking about being out in the country, and him coming in to supper, and everything nice for him and me cleaned up and waiting—Oh, my God! I've always been a good woman until now."

"I understand a great deal better than you think I do. You're not wicked. The only thing is—"

"No happiness is built on a foundation of wrong. It's been tried before, Tillie, and it doesn't pan out."

He was conscious of a feeling of failure when he left her at last.

patient into the ward, and his visits were the breath of life to the girl.

"New friends," he said, "and I went back to the ward. It was Friday and a visiting day. Almost every bed had a visitor beside it, but Sidney, finding an eye over the ward, found the girl of whom she had spoken to Le Moyne quite alone. She was propped up in bed, reading; but at each new step in the corridor hope would spring into her eyes and die again.

"Want anything, Grace?"

"No, I'm all right."

"You know that man I told you about the other day?"

Sidney nodded. The girl's anxious eyes were on her.

"It was a shock to me, that's all. I didn't want you to think I'd break my heart over any fellow."

Her eyes searched Sidney's face, from the city, aren't you, Miss Page?"

"Yes."

"You told me the street, but I've forgotten it."

Sidney repeated the name of the street, and slipped a fresh pillow under the girl's head.

"The evening paper says there's a girl going to be married on your street."

"Really? Oh, I think I know. A friend of mine is going to be married. Was the name Lorenz?"

"The girl's name was Lorenz. I—I don't remember the man's name."

"She is going to marry a Mr. Howe," said Sidney briskly. "Now, how do you feel? More comfy?"

"Fine. I suppose you'll be going to that wedding?"

"If I ever get time to have a dress made I'll surely go."

Toward 8 o'clock the next morning the night nurse was making out her reports. On one record, which said at the top, "Grace Irving, age nineteen," and address which, to the initiated, told all her story, the night nurse wrote:

"Did not sleep at all during night. Paced and eye staring but conscious of no pain. Refused milk at 11 and 3."

Charlotte Harrison, back from her vacation, reported for duty the next morning, and was assigned to E ward, which was Sidney's. She gave Sidney a curt little nod, and proceeded to change the entire routine with the thoroughness of a Central American revolutionary president. Sidney, who had yet to learn that with some people authority can only assert itself by change, found herself confused, at sea, half resentful.

Once she ventured a protest:

"I've been taught to do it that way. Miss Harrison's voice, not to suspicion, of course, but to memory. Without any apparent reason, he was back in Berlin, tramping the country roads, and beside him—"

"Wonderful night!"

"Great," he replied. "The mind's a curious thing, isn't it. In the instant since Miss Page went through that window I've been to Berlin and back! Will you have a cigarette?"

"Thanks. I have my pipe here."

K. struck a match with his steady hands. Now that the thing had come, he was glad to face it. In the flare, his quiet profile glowed against the night. Then he flung the match over the rail.

"Perhaps my voice took you back to Berlin."

Max stared; then he rose. Blackness had descended on them again, except for the dull glow of K.'s old pipe.

"For God's sake!"

"The neighbors next door have a bad habit of sitting just inside the curtains."

"But—"

"Sit down, Sidney will be back in a moment. I'll talk to you if you'll sit still. Can you hear me plainly?"

"After a moment—"

"I've been here in the city, I mean—for a year. Name's Le Moyne. Don't forget it—Le Moyne. I've got a position in the gas office, clerical. I got fifteen dollars a week. I have reason to think I'm going to be moved up. That will be twenty, maybe twenty-two."

Wilson stirred, but he found no adequate words. Only a part of what K. said got to him. For a moment he was back in a famous clinic, and this man across from him—it was not believable!

"It's not hard work, and it's safe. If I make a mistake there's no life hanging on it. Once I make a blunder, a month or two ago, it was a big one. It cost me three dollars out of my own pocket. But—that's all it cost."

Wilson's voice showed that he was more than incredulous; he was profoundly moved.

"We thought you were dead. There were all sorts of stories. When a year went by—the Titanic had gone down, and nobody knew but what you were in it—we gave up. I—in June we put up a tablet for you at the college. I went down for the—"

"The services?"

"Let it stay," said K. quietly. "I'm dead as far as the college goes, any day. I'll never go back. I'm Le Moyne now. And, for heaven's sake, don't be sorry for me. I'm more contented than I've been for a long time."

The wonder in Wilson's voice was giving way to irritation.

I HAVE TO GO TO MY CLUB



I AM GOING TO MY LODGE



I CAN'T MAKE MY HUSBAND DO ONE THING I WANT HIM TO DO



O, SYLVESTER DEAR, I BEG OF YOU TO STAY HOME—I IMPLORE YOU CAN'T YOU SEE I AM CRYING



COME RIGHT BACK HERE BILL! OR I'LL BREAK YOUR NECK



HOW STRANGE! I HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST DIFFICULTY TO MAKE MINE DO WHAT I WANT



Black Gold

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

Love plays a vital part in this inspiring romance of A HOTLY-CONTESTED OIL FIGHT

There is always something fascinating about the story of a man who "starts on a shoestring" and makes his way into a fortune. Such a story is told in

After that nothing could have kept him away, and he knew it.

The colored man in the farm the next day to be told that Miss Harrison had gone for a long walk and had not said when she would be back. That passed him. Evidently she was frightened, he thought. He thought of stopping the wedding, so that Sidney and Max would not walk down the aisle together.

Christine sat alone. The bridegroom had been sternly forbidden to come into her room.

But, when Sidney came, she sent for her. Sidney found her sitting on a stiff chair, in her wedding gown, with her veil spread out on a small stand.

"Close the door," said Christine. "And after Sidney had kissed her—"

"I've a good mind not to do it."

"You're tired and nervous, that's all."

"I am, of course. But that isn't what's wrong with me. Throw that veil some place and stop crying. You're a very delicate touch. Sidney thought brides should be rather pale. But under her eyes, which Sidney had never seen there before."

"I'm not going to be foolish, Sidney. I'll go through with it, of course. It would put me in my grave if I made a scene now."

She suddenly turned on Sidney.

"Palmer gave his bachelor dinner at the Club last night. They drank more than they should. Somebody called father up to-day and said that Palmer had emptied a bottle of wine into the piano. He hasn't been here to-day."

"He'll be along. And as for the other—perhaps it wasn't Palmer who did it."

"That's not it. I'm frightened, Sidney. Put her arms around Christine's shoulders."

"A man who drinks is a broken reed," said Christine. "That's what I'm going to marry and lean on the rest of my life—a broken reed. And that isn't all. I lost my self-confidence; that's all. Certain things happened; kept on happening. So I gave it up. That's all. It's not dramatic. For about a year I've stopped whining now."

"If every surgeon gave up because he lost cases—I've just told you I did your operation to-day, and I've been blowing about it ever since."

"I had everything for a while. Then I lost the essential. When that happened I gave up. All a man in our profession has is a certain method, knowledge—call it what you like—about the world needing men like you, although it's true enough. But our profession does. You working in a gas office, while O'Hara bungs and haunts, and I struggle along on what I learned from you!"

It takes courage to step down from the pinnacle you stood on. So it's not cowardice that has set you down here. It's wrong conception. And I've thought of two things. The first, and best, is for you to go back. No one has taken your place, because no one could do the work. But if that's out of the question—and only you know that, for only you know the facts—then the next best thing is this, and in all humility I make the suggestion.

Take the State exams under your present name, and when you've got your certificate, come in with me. The less magnanimity, I'll be getting a damn sight more than I give. Think it over, old man. M. W. Wilson's unexpected magnanimity put K. in a curious position—left him, as it were, with a divided allegiance. Sidney's frank infatuation for the young surgeon was growing. He was quick to see it. And where before he might have felt justified in going to the length of warning her, now his hands were tied.

Sidney went on night duty shortly after her acceptance. She did not sleep much. She tumbled into her low bed at 9 o'clock in the morning.

Charlotte Harrison went on night duty at the same time—her last night's service, as it was Sidney's first. She accepted it stoically. She had charge of the three wards on the floor just below Sidney's. The ward in which which all emergency cases were taken.

Sidney was glad to have her so near. She knew her better than she knew the other nurses. Small emergencies were constantly arising and finding her at a loss.

For Christine's wedding the street threw off its drab attire and assumed a wedding garment. In the beginning it was incredulous about some of the details.

The wedding was to be at 5 o'clock. This in itself defied all traditions of the Street, which was either married in the very early morning at the Catholic church or at 8 o'clock in the evening at the Presbyterian. There was something reckless about 5 o'clock.

The younger Wilson was to be one of the ushers. When the newspapers came out with the published list and this was discovered, as well as that Sidney was the maid of honor, there was a distinct stir through the hospital training school.

A probationer was sent to find out particulars. After submitting to many questions, Sidney, taking the probationer smilingly by the shoulders, faced her toward the door.

"You go back to the girls," she said, and told them to come in and see me when I am dressed, and tell them this: I don't know whether I'm to walk down the aisle with Dr. Wilson, but I hope I am. I see him very often. I like him very much. I hope he likes me. And I think he's handsome."

She showed the probationer out into the hall and locked the door behind her.

That message in its entirety reached Charlotte Harrison. Her amethyst eyes flamed. The acidity of it

started her. Sidney must be very sure of herself.

The curious thing was that Charlotte felt that she might stop the wedding if she wanted to. Sidney had based on a bit of information—many of which had been dropped for her. If Sidney was to be married, she thought of stopping the wedding, so that Sidney and Max would not walk down the aisle together.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE supper at the White Springs Hotel had not been the last supper Charlotte Harrison and Max Wilson had taken together. Charlotte had selected for her vacation a small town within easy reach of the city, and two or three times during her two weeks off duty Wilson had gone out to see her. He liked being with her. She stimulated him. For once that he could see Sidney, he saw Charlotte twice.

She had kept the affair well in hand. She was playing for high stakes. She knew quite well the kind of man with whom she was dealing. She was very skillful. The very ardor in her eyes was in her favor. Behind her hot eyes lurked cold calculation.

"Gad!" he said one day. "I look forward to these evenings. I can talk shop with you without either of us feeling awkward. You know—"

"As long as you talk shop," she said. "I feel that there is nothing wrong in our being together, but when you look at the other thing—"

"It is wrong to tell a pretty woman you admire her?"

"Under our circumstances, yes."

No tedious times were spent in the seat and sat looking at her.

"The loveliest mouth in the world," he said, and kissed her suddenly.

She had expected it for at least a week, but her surprise was well done. Well done also was her silence during the honeymoon ride.

She was not at all sorry, she said. It was only that he had set her thinking. When she got out of the car she told him good-night and good-bye. He only laughed.

"Don't you trust me?" he said, leaning out to her.

She raised her dark eyes.

"It is not that. I do not trust myself."

Things were not going any too well with K. True, he had received his promotion to chief of the gas department, and was able to do several things. But Wilson began to bring all his problems to K. There were more logical consultations in that small upper room. Perhaps more than one man or woman who did not know of K.'s existence owed his life to him that day.

Under K.'s direction, Max did marvelous. Cases began to come in to him from the surrounding towns. To his own dining was added a new and remarkable technique. But Le Moyne, who had found resignation if not content, was once again in touch with the work he loved. There were times when, having thrashed a case out together and outlined the next day's work for Max, he would walk for hours into the night over the hills, fighting his battle. The longing was on him to be in the thick of things again. The thought of the gas office and its deadly road sickened him.

It was on one of his long walks that K. found Tillie.

(To Be Continued.)

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